RESEARCH BRIEF

# BRINGING THE 'BEDTIME' STORY INTO INNER-CITY CLASSROOMS

Rosemary E. Young

This research project was funded under contract by the Ministry of Education, Ontario.

It reflects the views of the author and not necessarily those of the Ministry.

The Honourable Sean Conway, Minister
Bernard J. Shapiro, Deputy Minister

Ontario
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# BRINGING THE 'BEDTIME' STORY INTO INNER-CITY CLASSROOMS

Rosemary E. Young

A summary of a research study entitled *Arts in Education, The Use of Drama and Narrative* conducted by E. N. Wright and R. E. Young

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When children listen to the proverbial bedtime story, what do they learn? What do they learn if they not only listen to bedtime stories, but also dramatize them? In essence, these are the questions that were investigated in the research for the recently published paper Arts in Education. The Use of Drama and Narrative: A Study of Outcomes (Wright and Young 1985). The aim of the present paper is to present an overview of that research in a comparatively brief and less technical format. Readers interested in further details about the study are encouraged to obtain a copy of the full report through the Ministry of Education.

## THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The fact that children of parents with low incomes, little education, and unskilled or no jobs are less successful in school than children of parents with high incomes, university educations, and professional and managerial jobs is well-known. A continuing challenge for educators and psychologists lies in explaining and finding methods to overcome these scholastic deficits in children of lower socio-economic class backgrounds. In the past two decades, investigators trying to solve the riddle of the poor academic achievement of inner-city children have consistently found that middle-class children are more advanced than lower-class children on all traditional measures of language development and language-related skills including reading and writing. The delayed language development of the "poverty child" has been attributed to environmental differences between lower and middle-class homes. However, the specific differences in home environments that account for the delayed language development of lower-class children appear to have eluded investigation.

One well-established difference between lower- and middle-class homes is the presence of books and the young child's bedtime story ritual. Studies of North American families during the past fifty years have repeatedly demonstrated that lower-class children not only live in homes where there is little reading material of any sort, but that these children also have few experiences with stories in their preschool years relative to their middle-class peers. Young suggested that the impact of this class difference in home environments merited further investigation as a body of recent research in psychology pointed to the possibility that the absence of the bedtime story ritual might account for the educational lag of the lower-class child. While one can readily see that early experience with stories would provide greater variety in language experience, why did she maintain that it also might be related to a more fundamental thought process, namely, the development of the story schema?

Since 1975, a number of psychologists have been studying the schematic structure of simple stories and describing how we use it to understand, to remember, and to construct stories. A simple story, for example, is not understood or remembered as a string of words, but rather as a set of ideas that fits into a learned thinking structure called a story schema. Current investigators agree that the story schema is a set of learned expectations that we share about the characters within a story, the parts that comprise a story, and the causal and temporal relationships between those parts. Simple stories consist of one or more episodes, and an episode consists of an exposition, a complication, and a resolution, or, more colloquially, a beginning, a middle, and an end. Statements introducing characters (e.g.,

"Once upon a time there was a little boy..."), describing where they are ("...in the forest..."), what their socio-cultural circumstances are ("...living in a cave alone..."), and when the story is set ("...about 2,000 years ago..."), belong to the exposition. Reference to the initial setting, the exposition, prepares us for the complication, which contains statements about remarkable, interesting, or unexpected events (e.g., "Suddenly, a fierce dragon appeared..."). Given a complication, we expect a resolution of the events precipitated by the complication (e.g., "Finally, the dragon flew away and the boy lived happily ever after").

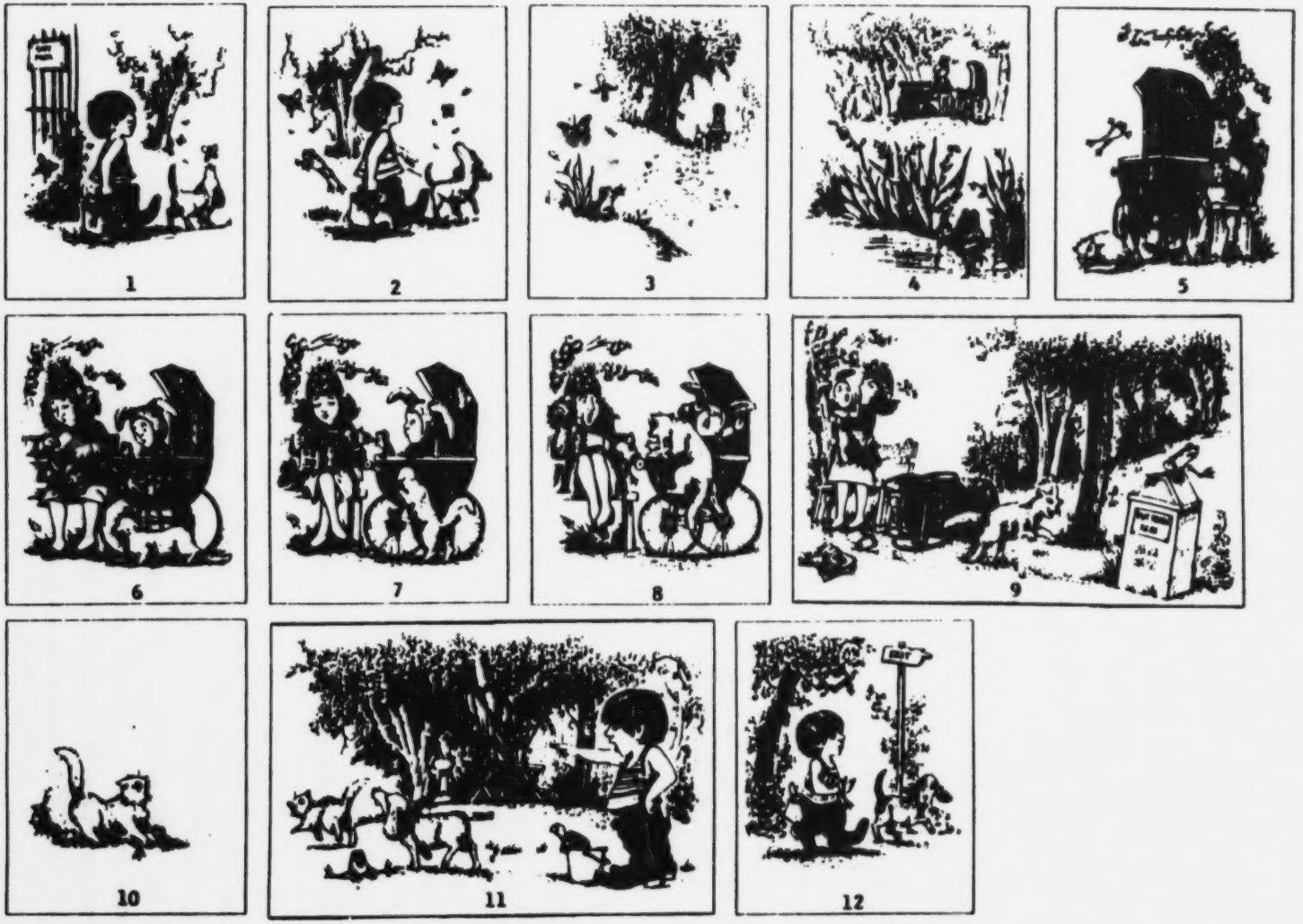


**FIGURE 1.** The Frog on His Own (Mayer 1973) Story

Episode 1:

| | |
|---|---|
| Exposition 1: | Boy walking to park with dog, frog and turtle (Picture 1) |
| Complication 1: | Frog jumps away without boy noticing (Pictures 2 and 3) |

Episode 2:

| | |
|---|---|
| Exposition 2: | Frog sees mother, baby buggy and cat (Picture 4) |
| Complication 2: | Frog jumps in buggy and difficulties ensue (Pictures 5-10) |
| Resolution 2: | Frog is rescued from cat (Picture 11) |

Resolution 1: Frog is rescued by his old friends and, thus, reunited with them (Pictures 11 and 12)

FIGURE 2 Narrative Structure of Frog on His Own (Mayer 1973).

A simple picture story, excerpted from Frog on His Own, which actually was one of the test stories used in this study, can be seen in figure 1. The assignment of pictures in the story to the episodic categories is shown in figure 2. Frog on His Own consists of two episodes, with the second episode being embedded in the first. The episodes are distinguished by a change in actors. As can be seen in figure 1, picture 1 functions as the exposition of the first episode, introducing a boy walking with his dog, frog, and turtle to the park. The complication of the episode begins in the next picture when the frog leaps out of the pail. In picture 3, it is apparent that the boy has not detected his absence. Picture 4 not only continues the first episode, but it also begins the second episode when several new characters are introduced, including a mother, a baby, and a cat. The complication of the second episode begins in picture 5 when the frog leaps into the carriage. The complication continues in pictures 6 through 10. Then, in picture 11, the runaway frog's adventures in the embedded episode are resolved. Picture 11 also is the beginning of the resolution for episode 1 as the frog is reunited with the boy, the dog, and the turtle. Picture 12 is the continuation of the resolution for episode 1: the frog is reunited with his old friends and they leave the park together.

The episodic structure of stories is so regular that middle-class adults and children find it very easy to understand and remember stories that fit their schema. They learn to use the schematic structure of stories, such as that of Frog on His Own, to guide their understanding of and memory for stories. For example, given an exposition and a complication, they expect a resolution to follow; these expectations, which act as an organizational structure, make it easier both to understand and remember the resolution. In contrast, unschematic stories pose great difficulty for middle-class adults and children as they attempt to use the story schema to guide their recall; essentially, they add new information and distort the events in the unschematic "story" so that their recollection of that "story" conforms more closely to a schematic story than to the original one.

Current investigators have assumed that young children develop knowledge about the story schema through having experience with stories such as that provided by the bedtime story ritual. Recently, Young experimentally investigated this assumption. Since lower-class children have few experiences with stories in their preschool years compared to their middle-class peers, she expected that lower-class children would be relatively older before they learned about the story schema and used it to help them understand and remember stories. Moreover, as so much of the curriculum is centered around the story in the early years of school, the years when the lower-class child falls behind, she predicted that a delay in the acquisition and use of knowledge about the story schema was a major factor accounting for the educational lag of the lower-class child.

To determine if lower-class children knew less about the story schema than middle-class children of the same age, Young studied four- and six-year-old children from lower- and middle-class families. These children were involved in story-telling sessions that allowed her to determine if they understood and remembered picture stories. They also were given scrambled or "mixed-up" picture stories and asked to rearrange or "fix-up" the scrambled pictures so that they told a good story; that is, they were asked to impose a story schema on

the pictures by changing them from the incorrect order to a more story-like order to see if they had acquired knowledge about the story schema. Then they told the story that went with their rearranged pictures. The results indicated that the middle-class children knew much more about story schema than their lower-class age-peers. In fact, the four-year-old middle-class children were more advanced than the six-year-old lower-class children, while the six-year-old middle-class children's performance on the tasks was quite similar to that of college adults. Subsequently, Young investigated the effects of giving four-year-old children, who attended an inner-city school, extensive experience with well-structured traditional stories. Since young children presumably learn about the story schema through listening to and/or reading stories, she expected that giving them additional experiences with stories would lead to an increase in their knowledge of the story schema and their ability to use it. The results of the study were consistent with this prediction. Given the extra experience with stories, the four-year-old lower-class children performed like the middle-class children had on both the story-telling and "fixing-up" or rearrangement tasks used in the initial study.

Young's results with the four-year-old lower-class children encouraged the present study. It seemed important to determine the outcome of a comparable program conducted in the regular classroom. The effect of such a program on Grade 1 or six-year-old children attending inner-city schools was of interest. Do Grade 1 students, beginning readers, learn about the story schema in the same manner and at the same rate as more rapidly developing four-year-olds? Alternatively, is the process of acquisition somewhat different and/or decelerated by the time children begin Grade 1? A program that combined both stories and drama also seemed to merit investigation. This interest was prompted not only by the natural affinity of stories and drama, but also by the suggestion that story-based dramas can enhance children's understanding of stories and their language development, and by the significance of dramatic play in the cognitive development of the young child. What effect would a program that entailed regular experience with story-based dramas have on Grade 1 students? How would it compare to one that only used stories?

## METHOD: PARTICIPANTS, TEST STORIES, AND PROCEDURES IN THE STUDY

### Participants

The 240 children included in the study were Grade 1 students who attended Toronto Board of Education inner-city schools. Grade 1 classes were assigned to a drama group, a story group, or a "no-program" group that continued with its regular Grade 1 program. Eighty children were included in each of the drama, story, and no-program groups. In each of these groups, forty children were native-English speakers and forty learned English as a second language. The number of males and females in each group was approximately equal.

The schools that participated in the study were asked to do so as investigations by the Inner City Department of the Toronto Board of Education had shown that students in these schools generally came from lower-class families. Children from these schools were considered

to be most in need of additional experience with stories as well as most likely to benefit from that experience.

## Test Stories and Scoring

The picture stories used with the children were those that Young constructed from commercial children's books illustrated by Mercer Mayer. The twelve-picture illustrated stories were excerpted from the following books: A Boy, A Dog, A Frog, and A Friend, Frog on His Own, Frog, Where Are You?, and One Frog Too Many. None of these stories have accompanying narrative; the pictures alone tell the stories.

Young developed the objective scoring system used in this study on the basis of examining some eighty college students' responses to the four stories. The children's stories were tape-recorded, transcribed, and then, in essence, compared in terms of the content of each simple sentence to the college adults' statements about the stories.

## Pre-Program and Post-Program Testing Procedures

The initial phase of the study entailed the testers familiarizing themselves with the children in each classroom. This was considered to be a critically important activity in the case of inner-city children who are known to be especially quiet both with teachers and testers in the school setting. This task was simplified by the fact that the testers took live frogs and wind-up plastic turtles to each classroom to ensure that the inner-city children were familiar with these amphibians who were characters in the test stories.

Prior to the beginning of the drama and story programs, all the children were tested in story-telling sessions like the ones Young used. In order to assess changes that were consequences of the drama and story programs, it was necessary to determine how the children understood and remembered stories and whether they could rearrange "mixed-up" ones prior to the program. Then, after the drama and story programs were completed, the children in the drama, story, and no-program groups were retested in the story-telling and story-rearranging tasks. Of course, to establish that the drama and/or story programs were effective and responsible for changes, the children in the drama and/or story program groups had to make greater changes than children in the no-program group. The children also were tested on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), a test of receptive language that correlates with ability scores and school success, during both the pre- and post-program testing sessions.

## Program Procedures

Both the drama and story programs were twelve weeks long. During that time, children in the story group had an extra story read to them every day. For half of the children in the story group, the stories were read by their classroom teacher, while an outsider (the co-investigator) visited three classrooms every day and read an extra story to the other forty children in the story group. Children in the drama group were visited by a drama consultant on eighteen separate occasions across a twelve-week period. All of the drama consultants read

or told a story during each drama session, and then had the children engage in dramatic activities related to the story. Both the drama and story programs entailed approximately twenty-seven hours of "special programming" over twelve weeks. During the twelve-week program, the children in the no-program group did not participate in any drama or story programs beyond those that were part of their regular school program.

## Story Program

The children in the story program heard sixty extra stories. The selection of the stories for the program emphasized children's classics such as Goldilocks and The Three Bears, The Three Billy Goats Gruff, The Three Little Pigs, and The Gingerbread Man. They are well-structured from a schematic point of view, and undoubtedly are known by most middle-class Canadian and American children. When possible, stories available in the "Big Book" format also were included.

## Drama Program

The drama consultants were concerned with presenting a story to the children and encouraging them to act it out and/or to act out analogous situations. Each drama consultant read a story to the class before, during, or after the drama had occurred; the timing of the story-reading varied with the nature of the lesson. Although an attempt was made to keep the drama sessions as comparable as possible, individual differences between the consultants were present (and will be discussed in a later section) as were a number of commonalities. All of the consultants assumed roles within the drama at times in addition to assuming the roles of teacher, narrator, and coach within the drama. Moreover, all of the consultants used the dramatic techniques of mime, body awareness exercises, and statues in their programs.

## Results and Discussion

Initially, the results for the entire group of children involved in the study will be discussed. Then, differences as a function of the drama consultant (for the drama group) and of the inner-citiness of the schools (for the story group) will be discussed.

In considering the pre-program test results, there were no significant differences between the drama, story, and no-program groups. Consequently, the following question became the major concern: Did the drama and/or story groups change more between the pre- and post-program testings than the no-program group?

### Comparisons Between the Drama, Story, and No-Program Groups: Results and Discussion

After hearing and looking at an additional story each day, children in the story group showed more improvement than the other children when they were asked to rearrange the scrambled stories, to impose a story schema on the scrambled story pictures. While they were

far from perfect on the task, their rearrangements represented a significant improvement over their performance during the pre-program test.

After the program, the children in the story group also described and recalled the stories in a qualitatively different way than children in the drama and no-program groups. The amount described and remembered did not vary as a function of program group; but the content or quality of the children's stories did. Children in the story group, relative to children in the other groups, included many more sentences in their stories about events that college adults think are central to the gist of the story. These sentences will be labelled as core sentences. Looking at picture 2 of the Frog on His Own story shown in figure 1, a core sentence is "The frog leaped out of the pail". Prior to the program, central events in the stories, such as this, often were missed by the children in the story group (as well as the children in the other groups). In the pre-program testing, children in the study tended to emphasize inessential, but correct details in statements labelled extra sentences. Using picture 2 in figure 1 again as an example, they might have used the extra sentence "The dog is chasing butterflies," and missed the frog's escape. In the post-program testing, the story group children were more likely than the other children to notice central events. After the program, the story group children also were more likely than children in the other groups to include sentences in their stories that could not be based on one picture alone, but rather depended on an understanding of the relationships between two or more pictures; such sentences are known as story sentences as they show an understanding of the story that cannot be gained from seeing only one picture. For example, viewing picture 11 in figure 1 in isolation from the story, one would not use the story sentence "The frog is rescued by his old friends" to describe the picture, as that picture alone does not include that information. Both the notion of "rescue" and the recognition that the boy, the dog, and the turtle are the frog's "old friends" depend on an understanding of the story pictures that preceded picture 11. The story group children also reduced the number of far-fetched or spurious sentences they used in the post-program testing relative to the pre-program testing. Looking at picture 11 in figure 1 again, "The boy is starting to eat his picnic," would be a spurious sentence as it is not a sensible interpretation of picture 11; there is no indication that the boy has a picnic lunch with him, even though a picnic table is seen in the background.

Another change noted in the story group was related to the use of story conventions. Exposition of setting statements such as "Once upon a time", temporal connectives such as "And then...", "Finally...", and "Suddenly...", as well as resolution statements such as "And they lived happily ever after..." are considered as story conventions. Authors typically use exposition and resolution statements of this type as well as temporal connectives when they are writing stories. Interestingly, the story group children used more story conventions when retelling the stories they had rearranged in the post-program testing than the children in the drama and no-program groups. Perhaps they were mustering all of their available resources to convince the adults listening to them that they had rearranged the scrambled pictures into an interesting story.

A final change noted in the story group was an increase in their post-program PPVT scores relative to their pre-program scores. This gain supports the conclusion that the story program had a positive effect on the children's language development.

The children in the drama group showed an improvement on two post-program tests relative to their pre-program performance that was not noted in the no-program group. Their PPVT scores increased over time like those of the story group. In addition, they used fewer spurious statements when describing stories in the post-program test than in the pre-program test. However, their picture rearrangement scores and their use of core sentences, story sentences, and story conventions did not change in the manner observed in the story group. It is somewhat surprising that the drama group did not show similar changes. One possibility that merits investigation is that the aforementioned differences between the drama consultants in their approach to combining stories and drama may have led to differential changes within the overall drama group.

## Comparisons Between Drama Groups in the Study: Results and Discussion

There were individual differences as well as a number of commonalities between the drama consultants. Consultant A usually followed the story-line in each book and then had the children engage in role-play. Consultant B generally focused on a scene within a story and had the children elaborate on it in role-playing situations involving pairs. Consultant C tended to use the story as a beginning point from which the children would elaborate on the story, create new episodes in it, and/or develop thematically similar but new stories. The approaches of all the consultants are well within the realm of drama. Nevertheless, these approaches emphasize different elements in the story and may not lead to the same outcomes. How did their approaches vary in emphasis? Consultant A tended to focus on the enactment of the story, while consultant B favoured the elaboration of scenes and the exploration of characters within the story. Consultant C's lessons were more likely to involve the extension of the story and invention. Children in her groups were asked to extend the stories, to alter characters and events, and, hence, to create new but related stories.

A re-examination of the drama program that focused on the three groups of children associated with consultant A, B, and C (and referred to for convenience as groups A, B, and C respectively) supported the view that differences between the drama consultants' use of stories in drama were associated with differential changes over time in the children. Children in consultant C's group changed more from the pre-program to the post-program testing than did children in the other groups. Not only did their PPVT scores increase more, but the children in group C also increased the amount they said. They increased the number of extra sentences they used, but not at the expense of missing points central to the story; the children in group C used more core sentences when describing and retelling the stories. They also used story conventions more frequently than children in the other groups. Thus, after the program, they differed from children in the other drama groups in a manner that is consistent with more adequate story comprehension and recall.

The children in consultant A's group differed from children in the other groups on several measures at the time of the pre-program testing. They used fewer core sentences and fewer core story sentences in description. As these differences were not present prior to the post-program testing, it is reasonable to infer that their ability to comprehend and recall the main points of the story (i.e., core sentences and story sentences) or its gist improved over time. Perhaps the initial differences between group A children and others were due to the fact that group A children came from slightly more deprived backgrounds than the others. Nevertheless, their experience enacting stories is associated with an improvement in their ability to grasp the main ideas in a story. However, their improvement is not so marked that it makes them comparable to group C children in the post-program testing.

The children in group B differed from children in groups A and C only in their use of story sentences during the pre-program testing. At the time of the post-program testing, the group B children no longer used significantly more story statements than the other children. In fact, examination of group B relative to the other groups shows little change over time on a variety of measures. Consultant B's observation that the classroom teachers showed comparatively little interest in the project, which was supported by two independent observers, may be as relevant to these minimal changes as are the differences in the approaches to drama.

It is clear that experience with drama that emphasized the extension of stories and the invention of new ones was associated with positive changes in consultant C's group. Children in group C clearly demonstrated an improvement in their ability to comprehend stories. Moreover, the changes in their PPVT scores and the amount they said about stories suggest that their dramatic experiences led to gains in their language development. Certainly one would expect that the children's improved ability to understand stories and their enhanced language skills would have a positive effect on their scholastic achievement.

## Differences Between the Story Group Children as a Function of the Inner-Citiness of Their Schools: Results and Discussion

In 1982, the Inner City Department of the Toronto Board of Education rated each school for the degree of "inner-citiness". Inner-citiness was determined by a weighting of parental income, type of housing, cultural background, number of single parents, number of families with both parents working, and mobility. Schools with a I rating have the most deprived students on this rating scheme; the children are likely to live in public housing with only one parent; family income is likely below the poverty line. Schools with a II rating serve less deprived, more stable inner-city families; the children are likely to live in privately rented or owned homes with both parents and to live above the poverty line, but not in affluence. Schools with a rating higher than III are not inner-city.

In this study, twelve of the classes involved were in class I schools, while nine were in class II schools. As the principals' and teachers' co-operation was required for a study of this nature, the assignment of classes to the drama, story, and no-program groups was

determined by the preferences of the schools and had a "first come, first served" flavour. Consequently, children from class I and II schools were not equally represented in the drama, story, and no-program groups. In fact, class I principals generally distinguished themselves from those in class II schools by saying their children were "not ready for drama." Hence, class I schools are disproportionately represented in the story and no-program groups, while class II schools are over-represented in the drama groups. However, the overall numbers of class I and class II children are similar (i.e., 121 to 119 respectively).

Inner-citiness was considered relevant to this study to the extent that a concerted effort was made to involve only inner-city schools in the study. Certainly, it seemed likely that inner-city children were most likely to benefit from the drama and story programs, but it was impossible to predict if the degree of "inner-citiness" would have an impact on the program outcomes. It was possible, however, to examine this question in the story group which included fifty-two children in class I schools and twenty-eight in class II schools.

The results of the comparisons between the children in the story group from class I schools and those from class II schools suggest that the class I children were differentially responsive to the story program. The children in the schools ranked II said more and used more core, extra, and story sentences as well as story conventions than the class I children during the pre-program testing. However, between the pre- and post-program testings, the class I children changed more than the class II children in the amount they said, the number of core, extra, and story sentences they used, and in their use of story conventions; marked increases were noted in their post-program test scores. In addition, the class I children's picture rearrangments were more closely related to the original story at the time of the post-program testing than were those of the class II children. These differential increases are especially interesting in view of the pre-program differences that favoured class II children. After twelve weeks in a story program, the class I and class II children responded similarly during the testings, and, as noted above, were more successful story-tellers than children in the drama and no-treatment groups. In a series of comparisons between the fifty-one class I and the twenty-nine class II children in the no-program group, a quite different pattern was observed. There were <u>not</u> any differential changes over time in the amount said or in the number of core, extra, and story sentences. In fact, the no-treatment group children who attended schools ranked II on the inner-city scale said more and used more core, extra, and story sentences during <u>both</u> the pre- and post-program testings than did class I no-treatment children.

In view of the comparison of changes over time in the class I and II children in the story and no-program groups, it is reasonable to conclude that the story program accounts for the observed changes in the class I children. As there were no differential changes over time in PPVT scores and no initial differences between group I and II children's PPVT scores, the observed changes cannot be attributed to differences in language development. Thus, sociolinguistic terms such as "willingness to use language" and "more competent communicators" seem appropriate. The class I children became more competent when asked to use their language to discuss the stories in the post-test session. Perhaps this was because they had made real gains in their ability to understand and remember normal stories and to schematize scrambled

stories; those gains may have had a facilitating effect, perhaps of a motivational nature, on their attempts to describe and retell the stories. Alternatively, becoming more familiar with stories and learning to enjoy them may have facilitated the development of their comprehension and recall abilities. Regardless of the directionality of the underlying psychological reasons for the changes in the class I children in the story group, it is clear that the class II children in the story group did not make such substantial gains.

The sociolinguistic impact of the story program on class I children, while unanticipated, is particularly significant from an educational perspective. The class I children's additional experience with stories is associated not only with an improvement in their ability to understand and remember normal stories and to schematize scrambled stories; it also is associated with an increase in their ability and/or willingness to use their language to communicate that knowledge. As Donaldson maintains, children are most receptive to mastering the intricacies of written language if they "are allowed to deal in the beginning with the familiar cadences of the spoken tongue," that is, if they are allowed to listen to written stories. Unfortunately, this study does not provide any information about changes in the children's attitudes towards learning to read and write. Nevertheless, several of the teachers in schools ranked I on the inner-city scale reported that the children were particularly interested in reading the story books that had been introduced to them in the story program and left in the classrooms for their perusal. Moreover, some of the children developed an interest in creating their own stories. In fact, the co-investigator who read stories in three of the classrooms often was greeted by children in two of the classrooms who wanted to show her their own stories. Interestingly, in the third classroom where the teacher displayed minimal interest in the program, like drama consultant B's teachers, the children rarely presented their own stories for perusal and comment.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The general concern of this study was to explore the effect that experiences with stories and story-based dramas have on the development of inner-city Grade 1 children. More specifically, the study examined the effect that experiences with stories and story-based dramas had on inner-city children's language development, on their knowledge of the story schema, and on their ability to use that schema to understand, remember, and reconstruct stories. The results of the study will be considered at a general level in this section and the implications of the results will be discussed. In addition, some potentially fruitful issues for future investigation will be identified.

The results from the overall study indicate that children in the story group changed the most over time in their ability to understand and remember normal stories and to reconstruct scrambled stories. Thus, the children's experience with stories had a direct positive effect on their performance on the post-program tests. Children in the story group did not differ from children in the drama group and no-program groups prior to the program. However, after twelve weeks of additional experience with stories, marked changes were noted in the story group children that were not apparent in the other children. In fact, at the time of the

post-program testings the children in the story group behaved more like the middle-class children that Young described. In describing and recalling the stories, they emphasized the elements of the pictures that were central to the story. Moreover, they understood the relationships between pictures that are important to the meaning of the story. When asked to impose a story schema on a scrambled sequence of pictures, the children's performance was significantly better than it was prior to the treatment period. Finally, the language ability of children in the story group, as indexed by their PPVT scores, also improved over time.

A possible reason for the failure of the drama group to show the same substantial gains observed in the story group is that differences between the consultants' approaches to drama may have led to differential changes within the group that were obscured in the overall analyses. Examination of the three consultants' groups provides considerable support for this explanation. The gains made by consultant C's group over time on a variety of measures were in the same direction as those observed in the story group, although not as pronounced. When these results are viewed in the context of differences between the consultants' approaches to story-based dramas, they are not particularly surprising. On an intuitive basis, one would expect that story-triggered dramas that involved the extension and/or invention of stories as well as enactment, as opposed to those emphasizing elaboration and/or enactment alone, would be most likely to foster the acquisition of knowledge about the story schema in young children. Dramas involving both the extension and invention of stories, in contrast to those favouring enactment of the actual story or elaboration of individual scenes, force the children not only to understand the structure of the original story, but also <u>to use that structure to create a new story</u>. The fact that consultant C's drama group heard approximately one-third as many stories as children in the story group may account for the remaining discrepancy between the gains made by the story group and drama group.

The marked changes in the story group children from the most inner-city schools, in contrast to the smaller changes in the class II story group children and the minimal changes observed in the no-program group children from both backgrounds, are of particular interest. Certainly, the children in the story group from more deprived backgrounds are more receptive to the program than their age-peers who attend schools that are class II on the inner-city scale. In addition to having an impact on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the class I children's stories and on their ability to schematize scrambled stories, the story program is associated with positive changes in their communicative competence and/or willingness to discuss stories that are not attributable to differential changes in language ability. Unfortunately, consultant C was not involved with a classroom from the most inner-city schools; nevertheless, it would be interesting to determine if the drama program that favoured the extension and invention of stories would be associated with parallel gains in the sociolinguistic sphere of development. Given the similarity between the gains of the children in consultant C's drama group and those of the story group children from the most inner-city schools, it seems reasonable to predict that comparable changes would be noted.

The data are clear enough and consistent enough to support the conclusion that children from class I schools in the story group and children in consultant C's drama groups acquired some knowledge about the schematic structure of stories through their programs and used it in

the rearrangement and story-telling tasks. However, these children did not make gains of the magnitude that Young observed in a study of four-year-old inner-city children. Unfortunately, the current design does not permit an unconfounded examination of the reasons for this difference. Young did not work in the classroom setting; rather, she withdrew groups of six children from the classroom as she thought maximum changes were most likely to be observed if the experiences with stories were provided in a small group setting. Moreover, she also worked with four-year-old children, children who are at a period in their development when "marked changes in the environment... can produce greater changes... than will equally marked changes in the environment at later periods of development". Thus, it is quite possible that providing experience with stories to Grade 1 children, even in groups including six children at maximum, might not lead to such marked changes. Alternatively, working with the entire classroom as a group even at the junior kindergarten level might lead to diminished gains in four-year-old children, relative to those reported by Young. However, as four-year-olds are more labile developmentally than children in Grade 1, it seems likely that a program comparable to the one reported in this study would have a greater impact if the children were younger.

A compelling reason for initiating a comparable study with inner-city children in junior kindergarten can be found in Young's results on the differences between four- and six-year-old children who attend inner-city schools and their age-peers who live in more affluent areas of Toronto. Those results show that four-year-old children are more advanced than six-year-old children from inner-city schools in their acquisition of knowledge about the story schema and their ability to use that knowledge to guide their comprehension, recall, and reconstruction of stories. While the inner-city child eventually may acquire the knowledge that his or her middle-class age-peer possesses when entering school, catching up to the middle-class age-peer may be virtually impossible.

As noted above, there is reason to hypothesize that a delay in the acquisition and use of knowledge about the story schema may be a major factor underlying lower-class children's comparatively poor achievement in the story-laden primary grades. For example, the ability to identify, extract, and remember important ideas from a story is an essential component of efficient thought processing and undoubtedly is important for success in school. In addition, learning to read, which is the basis for school success, may be more difficult for children who do not have any knowledge about the structure of simple stories. Schemata certainly aid middle-class adults in grasping the meaning of stories, and this knowledge about the story schema is likely to aid beginning readers in their efforts to comprehend and remember simple stories. Moreover, children lacking experience with stories probably have no familiarity with orthographic conventions such as reading each line of print from left to right, moving from the top to the bottom of the page, and reading the left-hand page before the right. Knowledge of any of these orthographic principles, which is evident in preschool children with extensive experience with stories, undoubtedly aids the beginning reader.

Furthermore, a motivational relationship between the development of knowledge about the story schema and reading readiness also may exist. Middle-class children arrive in school with a background of pleasant experiences with stories. These experiences, coupled with the

fact that reading is a valued activity in the home, presumably provide a degree of motivation in the child to learn to read, and they may offset the tedium that can be involved in that process. The middle-class child knows from experience that words and sentences are related to one another in interesting ways in stories. The lower-class child, however, usually does not have that backlog of pleasant experiences with stories. Moreover, that child does not see reading as a significant or valued activity in the lives of the adults in his or her home environment. Such children are unlikely to have positive expectations about the printed word, and the slow, word-by-word reading of these beginners is unlikely to suggest that interesting meanings, comparable to those in spoken language, can be found in print. Unless the child has learned to value the printed word through listening to and enjoying stories read to him or her in the classroom, it is quite possible that struggling to decode seemingly unrelated words in text may well extinguish any interest the lower-class child has in learning to read.

Children's performance in school subjects other than reading also may be related to their knowledge of the story schema. For example, a child's desire to learn to write probably is influenced by the same motivational variables that affect the desire to read. Furthermore, use of the story schema undoubtedly is a major factor in determining the quality of children's stories. Learning to write individual words such as "dog" and "cat" may seem like a worthwhile endeavour only to those children who know that the interesting ideas expressed in speech also can be communicated by the written word. In fact, the postulated motivational problems that the lower-class child encounters when entering school, in addition to the demonstrated lag in his or her knowledge about the story schema, stem from the lower-class families' orientation to an oral rather than a literary culture.

In many situations, the oral and literary traditions are of equal merit. School, however, is not one of those situations. Consequently, experience with stories may affect the acquisition of literacy, and thus, school achievement, in a most pervasive manner. Olson, Donaldson, the Scollons, Heath, and Gardner have noted that literacy is both the medium and goal of schooling in Western society. The Scollons and Heath, working as ethnographers in both Canada and the United States, and Holdaway, an educator in New Zealand, have suggested that middle-class parents begin to orient their children toward literacy within the first year of life. By two years of age, "incipient literacy" is noted in the middle-class child. This orientation toward learning from books is well-established by the end of the preschool years. The bedtime story ritual is considered to be the most important event in contributing to middle-class preschoolers' orientation toward literacy. In this ritual, the middle-class child discovers ways of learning about facts, values, and feelings from books and ways of talking about that learning. Through the bedtime story ritual the middle-class child also acquires knowledge about the schematic structure of stories and the ability to use it to guide the cognitive processing of stories. Moreover, in other contexts, that child learns to connect and to apply knowledge learned from books to other situations. Thus, in learning to read in school, the middle-class child has little more to do than learn to decode words and to write them. In sharp contrast, the lower-class child who has not experienced the bedtime story ritual or its equivalent must acquire knowledge about the story schema and its use. That child also must learn to learn from books, to talk about that learning, to connect it to other situations, to recognize the relationship between oral and written language, and, finally, to

decode and produce the written word. This may make catching up to the middle-class child a sisyphean task.

In the present study, however, the children in the story group and in consultant C's drama group did demonstrate an increment in their knowledge of and their ability to use the story schema. More importantly, the sociolinguistic changes observed in the story group children who attended the most inner-city schools suggest that they also learned to learn from books. They wanted to talk about that learning and to apply it in other situations - they learned to enjoy the printed word. Moreover, observation suggests that these children also learned to recognize the relationship between oral and written language. Unfortunately, the study was not designed in a way that permits an assessment of the progress these children made in learning to read and write, in acquiring the essential skills of a literary culture.

The present study has demonstrated that experience with stories and dramas entailing the extension and invention of stories makes a significant difference to children's comprehension and recall of stories and to their reordering of scrambled story sequences. The hypothesis that experiences with stories and dramas that entail the extension and invention of stories have an equally profound effect on school achievement awaits investigation. The method used in this study can be extended to address that question. There is an unusual urgency about this question as the answers may have particularly important implications for the education of the inner-city child. The potential human significance of such an investigation requires that it be undertaken without unnecessary delay.